

Water diversion project 'cheap' at \$14 million

Lake 'mess' in Getty's riding deserves cleanup—minister

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A \$14-million water diversion project to improve the fishing near the premier's Stettler home is "cheap at twice the price," says Alberta Environment Minister Ralph Klein.

Klein told reporters Wednesday Buffalo Lake is "a mess," and deserves a \$14-million fix-up. The lake is "a resource in Central Alberta."

"It's an area that has very, very few lakes," Klein said. "In my mind, yes, it's worth \$14 million. As a matter of fact I think it's cheap at twice the price if we can do something and do something right."

Premier Don Getty's planned new Stettler home overlooks the lake. An Alberta Environment report commissioned just months after Getty won the Stettler byelection contradicts all earlier studies by saying the lake won't be harmed by the diversion.

Government studies in 1982, 1984 and again in 1987 all concluded that diverting Red Deer River water into the lake would cause algae to choke the waters. Recreation would be hurt, and not helped.

The new study, released earlier this week, said that while algae

will bloom, it will not be in levels as unacceptable as first predicted.

Klein acknowledged his department remains concerned about the environmental impact of the proposed diversion.

"There is still some doubt right now. That's why we have to do the environmental impact assessment and go through the public hearing process and see if it works out."

Klein said Getty did nothing more than any other Stettler MLA has done to draw attention to the Buffalo Lake problem.

"He acted no differently than any other MLA who might have a problem in their constituency. Just because he is the premier, is he not then entitled to address a problem in his constituency?"

Klein added: "The fact is something would have been done with that lake whether or not the premier was the MLA."

Cabin owners on the lake, 19 km northwest of Stettler, have complained since 1978 that fluctuating water levels interfere with their boating, fishing and swimming.

The diversion was mothballed in 1984. Klein said the assessment process should be complete in about six months.

The environment minister's cost estimate for the diversion is \$1 million lower than the estimate given out by department spokesmen earlier in the week.

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